

## “Who Is the Performer and Who Is the Spectator?”

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# “Who Is the Performer and Who Is the Spectator?”

Richard Gregory and Renny O’Shea in Conversation with Cristina Delgado-García

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Richard Gregory and Renny O’Shea are artistic directors of the Manchester-based theatre company Quarantine, which they established with designer Simon Banham in 1998. Their heterogeneous body of work could be described as pertaining to the wide category of ‘theatre of real people’ (Mumford and Garde) or ‘theatre of the real’ (Martin). The performers appearing in their shows have ranged from professional dancers to toddlers, from technicians to animals; and spectators are often invited to participate in the event. Notable works include *See-Saw* (2000), *Eat Eat* (2003), *White Trash* (2004), *Susan & Darren* (2006), *The Soldier’s Song* (2008 and ongoing) and *Entitled* (2011). Quarantine’s latest project is *Summer. Autumn. Winter. Spring* – a quartet of performances about our relationship with time. The premiere of *Summer* took place in 2014, and the full quartet was presented in a marathon performance in March 2016 at the Old Granada Studios in Manchester. The conversation that follows took place on 6 June 2015 during the 24th Annual CDE Conference in Barcelona, “Theatre and Spectatorship”.

**Cristina Delgado-García:** Perhaps a good way to start would be by discussing how much of your work has been done with performers with a wide range of training or knowledge, as well as with what Rimini Protokoll would call ‘everyday specialists’ – non-professional performers that are in the piece for reasons other than their performance skills or expertise. In what way do you think that working with these ‘everyday specialists’ or participants has influenced the spectator experience?

**Richard Gregory:** I guess the first thing I would do is query the use of the word ‘participant’, to begin with, because we work with a whole range of people as performers, both trained and experienced performers and people who’ve never done anything like that before – sometimes separately, sometimes together in the same piece. I would always think of them and name those ‘performers’ rather than ‘participants’, I guess simply as a way of separating that out from a particu-

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lar history of theatre-making in Britain. In answer to your question, I think probably the most direct shift has occurred through working with people in projects that have taken place in very specific locations, where people are from that place and who might have friends, neighbours, relatives who might come along to see them perform – that makes a very distinct kind of audience, an audience that might in some ways might be quite different from a regular theatre-going audience.

**Renny O’Shea:** I think that’s true. We also get a lot of contemporary theatregoers, and they mix up in the audience. That’s our ideal audience, I think, a mixture of both.

**CDG:** It is interesting that you use the phrase ‘ideal audience’, because something that has recurrently cropped up in the last few days has been the fact that authors, playwrights or dramaturgs often have in mind an ideal spectator. I was wondering whether you, too, had an ideal spectator or audience when you’re preparing your work.

**ROS:** I don’t know if I agree with myself, actually!

**CDG:** Retract quickly!

**ROS:** Yes, I might retract it.

**CDG:** Richard?

**RG:** Do we have an ideal audience? On the one hand, I’d say, “No”. On the other hand, I’d say there’s certainly an instinct and a desire in our work – in the way that it’s constructed, and in the context that we make it and show it – to maybe find audiences or find connections with people that might not normally constitute the kind of regular theatregoing audience in Britain. We’re not terribly schematic about that; I don’t think that we particularly set out strategies to persuade that audience to come along, but often the work will take place in locations where an audience that wouldn’t necessarily attend a theatre space might come across it. Earlier today we were talking about what occurs when a piece like Renny’s *The Soldier’s Song*, which is a video booth, is presented in different contexts. It’s been on a railway station platform, in shops, in the foyer of the Barbican Arts Centre, at Battersea Arts Centre in London, but also in gallery spaces. It’s been in contemporary art galleries but also in, I guess, less chichi galleries, in municipal art galleries.

**ROS:** In northern municipal galleries, which is great, actually. People have stumbled across the work.

**RG:** Yes, there's a sense of people coming across the work almost by accident because that's the kind of space that they frequent. I think that makes a different kind of starting point in the relationship.

**CDG:** I'll return later to *The Soldier's Song*, but just to tie up a couple of things that you have mentioned here with the conversations that have taken place during this conference. In the last few days, there have been interesting discussions about artists' and spectators' desire to experience intimacy, to seduce or be seduced, to connect or to converse with others. However, most of the work referred to has been highly fictional. I was wondering whether you feel that working with 'real people' and their stories, and having these diverse or almost accidental audiences, makes for more sincere forms of representations of the self, or more authentic forms of connection.

**ROS:** I struggle with the word 'authentic'.

**RG:** Yes, there's been a kind of journey in our work across 17 years where we've grappled with that question, certainly at the outset. When we began our work as Quarantine, one of the things that we probably tried to do was, in a sense, to dramatise reality, to take people's lives and experiences as a starting point and really convert them into something else. I think this was partly because of the background that we both came from; for me particularly, I moved from being a director of plays, a director of dramatic theatre, into becoming interested in working in a different manner. Along the way, people have tended to respond to our work describing it as feeling 'authentic', or 'truthful', or 'honest'. Whilst egotistically there's something great about hearing that, I think there's also a problem with that description: it can negate, I think, some of the processes that have gone on in the creation of the work. So we're very conscious that our process of making work has a heavy artistic and editorial hand, and that we shape and mediate the material that someone has chosen to share with us. We also know that what they're sharing with us isn't the entirety; we assume that it's truthful, but we're responding to what people are telling us in a rehearsal room. I think in more recent Quarantine work, what we've tried to do is to make that problem, I guess, explicit within the work. We've tried to find strategies in the making of the work that maybe move away from that sense of dramatising those experiences and rather towards finding strategies, structures, be they games, rules, menus, instructions – ways of both provoking and framing the work that make it very

clear and visible what the processes are to arrive at the presentation of the material.

**CDG:** It's really interesting to hear about this evolution in your work. Perhaps it's a good idea to go back to the beginning and trace those changes. I'd like to talk about *See-Saw*, the first performance that Richard directed in the year 2000. I know you have a video of it.

**ROS:** The quality of it is awful. It's before we started paying attention to those kinds of things, but it gives you an idea.

**RG:** We barely expected to be still going 15 years later, let alone showing it in Barcelona!

**CDG:** Well, there you go!

**RG:** I think I should explain what *See-Saw* was, because it might not make sense otherwise. We made a first version of it in 1998, a very small version, and then we were commissioned by Tramway in Glasgow to make a full-blown version. The version at Tramway was made with 75 people who lived in Glasgow, and a mix of some people who'd performed before and largely people who hadn't. A very wide age range – the youngest in the piece was a baby, about five or six weeks old when we started the process and obviously some months old when we finished. I think the oldest person was a woman in her 80s. We spent about a year and a half gathering the group of people that were going to be involved in it, and then an intense period of a couple of months' rehearsal developing the work with them.

**CDG:** The spectators' experience was quite peculiar in *See-Saw*.

**RG:** It began before you entered the theatre. If you were to arrive at Pollokshields East train station, which is just next door to Tramway, you might or you might not notice that there's a man with a bunch of flowers waiting on the platform for a train to arrive. He doesn't do anything, he has no text to speak, there's nothing pre-prepared to do; he's simply waiting there, so you may well pass him by. Similarly, on Albert Drive a couple of women in a bus shelter, where the bus would stop closest to Tramway, were playing some music. You might notice them, you might not. You might see the group of teenage girls and the group of teenage boys across the road from the theatre; you might not notice that there's milk spilt in the theatre doorway. You almost certainly wouldn't notice that the guy across the road from the theatre is wearing his Elvis impersonator costume under his

overcoat. When you enter the theatre you get a ticket, as you would regularly in entering a theatre space. Some of the audience get a ticket marked ‘door A’ and some go through ‘door B’ – in fact, this was our legacy to Tramway; the doors marked A and B are still there. This is where I have to play the terrible video.<sup>1</sup>

Tramway is an enormous space. We built a white gauze cube in there, so we turned it into a room and you find yourself facing a rather conventional, I guess, theatre space. When the music comes to an end and the house lights drop, the red curtain eventually will fall – there it goes, dramatic pause – and there, facing you, is not the stage but the other half of the audience. The 75 performers are intermingled throughout the audience. They’re dressed in their own everyday clothes. They don’t do anything until they have a moment in the performance where something predetermined is going to happen, so you don’t know who a performer is until they speak; or in some cases some people play music. So, it’s a 360 degree experience; there are performers in front of you, performers either side of you, potentially behind you, wherever. In the first five minutes of the performance, nothing rehearsed happens, so we just wait. I don’t think it happens in this video, but something that happened in several performances was that people would wave to see if it was a mirror. On one occasion a guy, a member of the audience, after about four minutes of this nothing happening, pulled a magazine out from his bag and said something like “For God’s sake!”, because he thought this was a terribly pretentious start to a piece of theatre, and maybe assumed that nothing was going to happen. Of course, his action became the opening of the piece of work.

**CDG:** You mentioned a dramatisation of the real in your earlier work. How did that materialise in *See-Saw*?

**RG:** The piece was constructed out of fragments and material made with all of these 75 people. For example, there’s a man here – it’s very blurry but I know because he was wearing a yellow shirt; he was a local florist. He had a bag full of loose flowers and during the performance he put the flowers together and he made them into a bouquet. Then he passed them back through the audience, to arrive at some guy who was the person that was waiting at the train station with the bunch of flowers, and who tells us about how he met his now wife on a blind date, where he was told to turn up with a bunch of flowers at a train station. Then the next person to speak, who’s on the opposite side, is his 10-year-old son, who stands up on his chair because he’s not very tall and tells us about his interest in

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<sup>1</sup> The video for *See-Saw* that was shown during this conversation can be accessed at <<https://goo.gl/oHWErv>>.

outer space and this thing called... I think it's called 'spaghettification', which is a way in which we can explain random occurrences in the universe. The whole piece unfolds in that way. No one ever leaves their seat until at the very, very end. Again it's too blurry to see, but in the middle there's a 12-year-old girl, and at the very end she gets up from her seat and she meets her identical twin, who's on the front row of the other seating bank. There's a little bit of choreography and they change places – or do they?

**CDG:** I know that *See-Saw* really influenced your future work, so perhaps you could tell us a bit more about this.

**RG:** Yes, I realised quite recently that for me, in many ways, *No Such Thing* is in some sense a *See-Saw* in miniature. *No Such Thing* is an ongoing project that we've been making for the last two-and-a-half years. We make it once a month in a curry cafe in the centre of Manchester, a Pakistani cafe. We used to live round the corner from it and it was somewhere we went really regularly. We were invited about two-and-a-half years ago by a couple of curators in Manchester who were making work in non-art spaces to make a one-off piece of work for them. The piece that we made was *No Such Thing*, where the invitation is to a stranger to come and have a conversation with us in exchange for a curry; we buy their lunch and we have a conversation. The conversation is shaped by or guided by a menu of starting points or provocations for conversation that we create afresh each month. Each time it has an overarching theme which varies widely. The conversation takes the amount of time it takes to eat a curry. It's a very direct and intimate exchange. We carried on beyond this first version of it, and now we do it every month. We don't document it, it's not research for something else; it simply is that brief moment of encounter between two strangers. It's invisible within the cafe; no one else really knows that it's going on. There are other people in the cafe doing the same thing, but not organised in the same way. For me, there's a very interesting exchange that's occurring: who is the performer and who is the spectator? It shifts across the conversation. Sometimes it's blurred, or even removed. For me, in a sense, that almost shrinks what was going on in *See-Saw* down to a much smaller, microscopic version of a very intimate encounter.

**ROS:** In a review of *See-Saw*, Joyce McMillan said – I can remember it word for word – “It just reminds us, in the most potent way possible, that behind every ordinary face we pass in the street there beats a life of infinite complexity”. This became almost a manifesto, although we didn't quite realise it at the time. I think we still try to do this. You could use this same quote for *No Such Thing*, couldn't you?

**RG:** Yes. It's a project that – pardon the pun – really feeds us. We continue to do it because it continues to provoke new encounters, to provoke ways of being able to think about ideas and thematics, I guess, in a live encounter with someone that we're going to meet very briefly. It's a nice project to do.

**ROS:** Going back to the idea of spectatorship, *See-Saw* gave you complete licence to look at anybody, because you didn't know who was in it and who wasn't, so you could stare at anyone. It was great. We also did that in the most recent show, in *Summer*. There was an explicit instruction for the audience, "Look at us while we look at you", which is what happens in *See-Saw*.

**CDG:** Maybe we can jump from your first show to your latest large-scale piece, *Summer*. I'm really interested in your use of instructions here, both for the thirty-odd performers and for the audience.

**RG:** Yes, *Summer* is essentially about trying to create the circumstances in which we can really focus on what is happening in this present moment, in this encounter between these people on this side of the room and these people on the other side of the room. Dramaturgically, it uses strategies to try to allow its performers to respond with great immediacy and spontaneity to what the situation is. We use projected instructions, so behind the audience is a screen that the performers look at – and the audience can turn around and look at – that offers the performers onstage a series of instructions to follow. We have a core team of performers, and a couple of them sit within the audience and essentially do interviews, ask questions direct of the performers on stage. A writer that we work with very regularly, Sonia Hughes, sits at the back of this space. Sonia writes live text in response to what's occurring on stage and what's occurring in the audience, and her text appears on a screen that's just suspended above the auditorium. The instructions are almost chapter headings that I tried to write in an ambiguous way. I think they read from at least two clear perspectives: in one way, they describe what's about to happen, and in another way they function as a potential instruction for the audience. I guess, going back to *See-Saw* and sewn throughout our work – and probably maybe more in your work, Renny, than in mine, or at least as much – there is this sense of trying to offer potential situations to the audience to engage with or not, so that the invitation to become quite active within the work is present and explicit but never cajoles, or forces, or pushes the audience into that position. That's how the instructions for the audience in *Summer* function in some way.





**Fig. 1:** *Summer* (2014) was first performed in Salford by a diverse group of 37 people, aged 18 months to 76 years. Photo: Simon Banham, Quarantine's co-founder and designer.

**CDG:** This invitation to the audience is very clear in the meal-based performances that Renny directed. Renny, could you tell us a little bit about the process and the performance of *Eat Eat*?

**ROS:** Yes, it was made with a group of Leicester-based asylum seekers and refugees a long time ago. I don't think I'd work with people in that kind of constituency now, but it took place in the Guildhall in Leicester, which is Leicester's oldest building, and took the form of a meal. Audience and performers sat around the table, about 40 people.<sup>2</sup> Like *See-Saw*, you didn't necessarily know who was audience and who was performer until someone did something that you assumed was performative. Sometimes those were interventions by members of the audience, but we just went along with them anyway. [In the video, a section of the table is lifted and dislodged by a performer underneath it; his head and naked torso emerge slowly through the opening]. I really hate this bit! I don't like the drama of it; it almost fictionalises something.

**CDG:** You mentioned that, much like in *See-Saw*, there was an uncertainty in *Eat Eat* about who is a performer and who is 'one of us', but there was a clear invitation.

<sup>2</sup> The video for *Eat Eat* that was shown during this conversation can be accessed at <<https://goo.gl/ylyuj0>>.

**ROS:** Yes, the performers were very much the hosts of the meal, so I guess that we were welcomed into the space. We knew who some of the performers were and they were really in charge, they were really making the thing happen. As audience, I think you were very much part of this meal. There's a really interesting article in *Performance Research* that someone wrote about the moment when one night four members of the audience got up and left.<sup>3</sup> I don't have a problem with people leaving shows when they don't like them, but it felt really different because it was a meal. We were guests, we'd been invited, and people were being really nice to us.

**RG:** It was at a really precise moment; the way the piece was constructed was around five courses in the meal, and each course allowed for the revelation of different performers and their material, their histories. When the main course arrived, there was a guy from Zimbabwe who'd been a teacher. What was his name?

**ROS:** Bernard.

**RG:** Bernard. We were about to eat a stew with mealie pap, which you eat with your hands, and so he taught us, in a really light and engaging way; he taught us how to eat with our hands. He went through this whole process of, "Raise your left hand; now sit on it. Now you raise your right hand". He talked about the sensual pleasure of eating with your hands and so we began to eat with our hands. The four people Renny mentioned refused to eat with their hands; they asked for cutlery, then they ate their main course and left. It felt like a very singular statement. I think the problem wrapped up in that is a really complex one. I had been invited to be an associate artist at a theatre called Leicester Haymarket in the centre of England. It had been quite a traditional programme of work, very dominated by musicals, and I was invited in to try to curate a programme of work that would somehow challenge or reinvigorate that. Nepotistically, I commissioned us – Renny and I – to make what was, I think, a really beautiful piece. Inevitably what happened, and quite rightly, is that this piece attracted a very mixed audience, an audience that was a crossover of people who were interested in the issue, people who had some connection with the performers, people who were interested in the formal experiment of the work, and perhaps people who are very regular theatregoers at Leicester Haymarket, who

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3 See Dougherty and Mangan.

may or may not have experience of this kind of work. It's tempting to make a value judgement about their action, but of course we don't know why it was.

**CDG:** The idea behind *Eat Eat* was then taken to Belgium in 2004, in a piece that was entitled *Rantsoen*. Did you find any differences in how it felt to perform this in Leicester, a tremendously multicultural place, and in Ghent?

**ROS:** Yes, enormous. I was invited by Victoria – a performing arts production platform based in Ghent, now called CAMPO – to make a version the following year, which I did with a similar group of people, mostly newcomers to Ghent. I think it wasn't a successful show. I didn't like it as much as the first time I did it – for lots of reasons. I did it on the wrong shaped table; I decided we needed a round table. I don't know how I didn't realise how far away you'd be from people. On a long table like the one we used in *Eat Eat*, you're actually really near to quite a few people around you; it's very easy to talk. On a round table, you're miles away and it doesn't feel democratic in the same way, which really took me by surprise. The big thing that didn't work about *Rantsoen* in Ghent was that it was a very white, very bourgeois audience, and so when you came in you knew immediately who the refugee was. In Leicester it just wasn't like that; you didn't know if the people coming in were accountants, or refugees, or someone who worked in a chip shop, or whatever they were. It revealed itself much more gently. In Ghent it felt a bit swamping.

**RG:** Yes, context is really crucial.

**ROS:** It felt much more objectifying, I guess, which it absolutely didn't feel like in Leicester; it felt very inclusive of all of us over there.

**CDG:** It's interesting that you mention context and distance. You also mentioned an important democratic and inclusive feel, and earlier this idea of enabling a curiosity for others, taking the time and the licence to observe. Why are these aspects so important throughout your work? What is it about them that appeals to you, and why do you think they are important in this very moment?

**ROS:** We've always talked about our work setting up the circumstances for a conversation in some way. I think that's what it does, sometimes quite easily in the meal-based stuff – it's very easy, it's very convivial to chat to someone over food. It's something that people recognise often, people relax and the conversations happen.



**Fig. 2:** *Rantsoen* (2004), a co-production with Victoria and Victoria Deluxe Ghent. Photo: Simon Banham, Quarantine's co-founder and designer.

**RG:** I think for me there's undoubtedly some kind of personal roots in where that interest comes from. I was talking to Andy Smith the other night about the influence of our fathers on our work. I distinctly remember my dad, who had a disability; he'd had polio when he was a child, so he walked with a shuffle, and I distinctly remember as a child that my dad was very interested in and embracing of the people locally. I grew up in a very small town in the middle of England and he was very embracing of people who might otherwise be seen as outsiders, somehow. On a very personal level, I think that creates an impression and a stamp, and that's probably what fuels some of that impetus in the work. Obviously, that idea becomes more complex and complicated as time goes on. I think for me one of the key questions at the heart of what we do revolves around ideas about representation and questions about who should represent who and how should that take place? I think that for me those questions are vital questions about society, but they're also questions that remain at the heart of theatre. So I think much of our exploration of ways of making work, and ways of making work with different kinds of performers, and engaging with different kinds of audiences in different situations, has grown out of that interest in

questions about representation. My dad’s got something to do with it, but not entirely.

**CDG:** Let’s return to *The Soldier’s Song* in the time that we have left, as it is a piece that poses questions about representation inside and outside the theatre, about how invitations are put forward in your work, and about the shift or blur between being a spectator and being a performer.

**ROS:** *The Soldier’s Song* – eventually – took the form of a wooden karaoke booth. Inside was a 42-inch TV screen at head height-ish and a microphone stand, a list of soldiers, and a list of songs. So it was an invitation to sing along, and you chose one song and you could sing along or not sing along. I wasn’t in the booth; I don’t know if they took the invitation or they didn’t; I don’t know. A lot of people did, but they could have just stood there and watched the films of the soldiers singing.

**CDG:** Where did the idea come from?

**ROS:** From a really clear place, actually. I became aware that we were involved at that point in two wars – two overt wars, I should say. I reached a point with them where I didn’t know what I thought anymore; I didn’t know what the right thing to do was. How should we proceed here? What do I think about them? It was really disconcerting for me that I’d always been very clear about what I think – too clear, maybe. I thought, “I need to make something with soldiers”, but I didn’t know any soldiers, so the research part of it was a lot through YouTube, through finding films and various video footage that people had posted onto YouTube. There’s also various videos of people lip-syncing. There are loads of them – of the Army doing it, of the Marines doing it, of the Navy. That was really interesting to me. Then eventually I had a fixer, a connection in the army who just set me up interviews with people and connections with various soldiers, so I just started talking to them. I wanted to know about their lives in connection to mine, because they fell so far away, really, from me. They were also quite fascinated with me; they couldn’t believe I didn’t know any soldiers. I was like, “No, I don’t; of course I don’t”. They were like, “Everyone knows a soldier”. I said, “We don’t; people don’t”. I don’t move in those circles. I do now, but I didn’t then. It started there, and then talking to one soldier I just said, “What do you do in your spare time?”, because I was very naïve, which is a position of strength if you really don’t know anything. I could be quite honest and say, “Tell me about your life”. One of them said, “I like to sing karaoke”. He was a big guy; he’s in the Grenadier Guards. He’s 6’ 6” and he’s got a real killer stare. The thought of him singing karaoke was quite fascinating, so it started there.

**CDG:** So, they chose the songs that they would...

**ROS:** They chose the song, yes.

**CDG:** Shall we quickly play the clip that you have for *The Soldier's Song*? As a pacifist, I had a vague but instant feeling of rejection to the idea of this piece, until I saw the video. My heart melted.<sup>4</sup>

**ROS:** That's Sergeant Heather McGregor. She's got a lovely voice.

**CDG:** I know you're very interested in portraiture, how a portrait might be created without any sort of direct self-revelation and how portraits elicit strong readings from spectators. The soldiers are not speaking about their own lives directly, but a portrait is being created through their singing and their presence. I imagine you probably have talked to some audience members who went in.

**ROS:** I know just what people wrote in the comments book, and what they told me if I knew them. It seemed that people, no matter where they were on the political spectrum of being pro-war, or anti-war, or wavering in between, or whatever it was, reacted really strongly, which was really gratifying. I realised that that's what I wanted, actually, just for people to stop and think about their connection with that soldier on-screen – who am I in relation to you? You pay your taxes for them; they represent you, whether you hate them, or love them, or somewhere in between. You still pay your taxes for them.

**CDG:** Thank you very much. I am going to open this to the floor.

**Elizabeth Swift:** I'm really interested in the slippage between being a performer and being an audience member. I was just interested also in this theme that has been emerging over the last couple of days about the successful and the less successful audience. I wonder, do you feel that the audience is a group or a set of individuals?

**RG:** For me, very much a set of individuals. When I think about audience, I'm quite self-motivated; I think about myself in that audience and I think about how

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<sup>4</sup> The video for *The Soldier's Song* that was shown during this conversation can be accessed at <<https://goo.gl/NEDPy6>>.



I’m reacting, how I’m responding. I don’t think I try to imagine an amorphous mass that will respond in particular ways; in making the work, I try to make a sense of personal connection with it. So, yes, I very definitely see the audience as a group of individuals. I think our work tends to elicit very, very diverse responses, and we’re conscious about that because sometimes those responses are invited in a variety of ways in the performance itself. The performance itself might have windows within it where that idea that the audience is made up of many different individuals is made explicit within the performance.

**Chris Megson:** Thank you very much. It seems to me that the examples of pieces that you’ve talked about bring audiences into proximity with people that they may not usually have a conversation with, or be in the same room as. I was really interested in the frame, the way in which you set up those conversations, whether it’s the meal or whether it’s the karaoke. I’m also interested in how you two actually work together in determining those frames and how you’re going to create a space in which to allow those encounters to unfold. Could you talk a bit more about that?

**RG:** We tend to work separately, most of the time; occasionally, maybe more recently, we’ve made things together. Over the years, we’ve probably functioned as one another’s dramaturg in an informal way, and we’ve started to label that and formalise that more recently. In terms of the frame, I think maybe there’s something about trying to work with or trying to set up a familiar trope that people can engage with and walk into, and then somehow to create some slippage within that, to make unfamiliar the broader familiar frame. In the right circumstances, that familiar frame can afford people a way in, a way of engaging, or at least stepping over the threshold of the work before we can then take it somewhere else and make it more complicated.

**ROS:** I think we’re quite gently explicit about the rules, if there are rules in particular circumstances, so people don’t feel like they’ve got something wrong – did I do it right, is that right? We try not to make it be a guessing game, in whatever form it takes; those invitations should be clear.

**Gareth White:** Renny, when you were explaining your work with refugees you suggested that you wouldn’t choose to work with the community in that way anymore. Could you talk a little bit more about that? I just wonder if there’s been a change in approach, or if there are conscious or unconscious principles about who you work with.

**ROS:** I think I wouldn't work with that particular constituency because I'm not making participatory community theatre, theatre that you make for the benefit of those taking part, with their experiences at the centre of it. At that time, it was more common to see artists working with untrained people or with people that had never done anything like this before – work that wasn't participatory community theatre, that was guided by something else. It wasn't much more common but we'd seen it in Europe. For me, *Eat Eat* was also very much about exploring a political moment, when 'refugee' became a dirty word as opposed to just a description of someone's circumstance. It was an exploration of hospitality and of my own questions about the country where I lived.

**RG:** Going back to the question of representation, if you work with a group with a label – the refugee community, for example – then in a sense you're identifying that that particular group of however many people is somehow representative of that experience. But how can we put ourselves in a position of representing a particular group of people? I think we started to question that approach. I was once told that John Fox, the artistic director of Welfare State International, had said: "There is no such thing as community; there are only community events".<sup>5</sup> I still go along with John on that one, I think.

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<sup>5</sup> The orchestration of community events was central to the practice of British theatre company Welfare State International. Operative between 1968 and 2006, their eclectic body of work has been described as "carnavalesque agit prop" (Kershaw 212). For more on Welfare State International, see Kershaw (206–42).